

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 AGR-05 COME-00 TRSE-00 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8347

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, PO

SUBJECT: 1976 WHEAT HARVEST ESTIMATES LOWERED

1. "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS" AUGUST 26 GAVE FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE TO RESULTS OF JUNE 1976 REPORT FROM THE INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL STATISTICS, INDICATING THAT 1976 WHEAT HARVEST ESTIMATES HAVE BEEN LOWERED FROM THE "RECORD HARVEST" PREDICTIONS BASED ON MAY 1976 DATA. HOWEVER, JUNE REPORT STATES THAT WHEAT YIELD WILL BE 1,426 KILOS/HECTARE, A YIELD PER HECTARE 10 PERCENT HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR'S YIELD, AND 29 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE AVERAGE YIELD FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS. REPORT ATTRIBUTES REDUCED ESTIMATES TO POOR WEATHER CONDITIONS AND PLANTING IN UNSUITABLE AREAS.

2. COMMENT: THIS ANNOUNCEMENT IS ALMOST CERTAINLY THE FIRST STEP IN A GOP CAMPAIGN TO GRADUALLY INFORM THE COUNTRY OF A DISAPPOINTING WHEAT HARVEST. THE PCP AND OTHER STRONG SUPPORTERS OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM, INCLUDING SOME WITH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, HAVE BEEN PREDICTING A RECORD CROP. PREDICTIONS OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND EVEN WHEAT EXPORTS IN 1976 HAVE BEEN USED TO JUSTIFY ILLEGAL MEASURES SUCH AS LAND OCCUPATIONS. THE LOW HARVEST

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MAY DAMAGE THE IMAGE OF THE PCP NATIONALLY AND WILL

PROBABLY WEAKEN ITS SUPPORT EVEN IN THE ALENTEJO. IT MAY ALSO HARM PS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE LOPES CARDOSO WITHIN THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

3. RECENT INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO AG ATTACHE INDICATES THE TOTAL HARVEST MAY BE AROUND 650,000 TONS, SLIGHTLY BELOW THE 1974-75 CROP. IF THIS IS ACCURATE, THE YIELD FIGURE IN THE ANNOUNCEMENT IS OVERSTATED BECAUSE AT LEAST 19 PERCENT MORE LAND WAS PLANTED THIS YEAR. WHILE THE ANNOUNCEMENT GIVES YIELD FIGURES AS OF JUNE, THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE ALMOST CERTAINLY HAS UP-DATED INFORMATION WHICH INDICATES THEY ARE EVEN LOWER.

4. THE RECENT HOT SPELL HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN A FACTOR IN THE LOW HARVEST. HOWEVER, PLANTING OF MARGINAL LAND AND OVERSEEDING UNDOUBTEDLY ALSO HAS BEEN A MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTOR. FURTHERMORE, MUCH LAND PLANTED THIS YEAR SHOULD HAVE BEEN LEFT FALLOW, AND IF PLANTED NEXT YEAR, WILL YIELD EVEN LESS.
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